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Author

Title

Imprint



THE
INFLUENCE OF FREEDOM
ON
POPULAR AND NATIONAL EDUCATION:

A LECTURE,

DELIVERED

AT THE OPENING OF THE ASSOCIATION LECTURE ROOM,
IN THE ATHENÆUM,

TROY, FEBRUARY 24, 1846.

BY NATHAN S. S. BEMAN.

TROY, N. Y.:

PUBLISHED BY YOUNG & HARTT, 216 RIVER-STREET.

PRESS OF KNEELAND & CO.

1846.

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ROOMS OF THE YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION, }
February 26th, 1846. }

At a Meeting of the Executive Committee, it was unanimously
Resolved, That the thanks of this Committee be presented to the Rev. DR.
BEMAN for the very eloquent and appropriate Lecture delivered by him at the
opening of the Association Lecture Room in The Athenæum; and that he be
requested to furnish a copy thereof for publication.

DEAR SIR,

It becomes the agreeable duty of the Committee on Lectures
to communicate to you the Resolution above, and to ask your compliance with
the request which it contains.

Very respectfully,

Troy, February 23th, 1846.

Yours, &c.

G. ROBERTSON, JR.	JNO. G. BRITTON,	} <i>Lecture</i> <i>Committee.</i>
JOSEPH WHITE,	GEO. H. COOK,	
THOS. B. CARROLL,	ALONZO MCCONNIE,	
JOHN E. WARREN,	URI GILBERT,	

Troy, March 3d, 1846.

To the Committee on Lectures:

GENTLEMEN,

I have received your Note and the
accompanying Resolution of the Executive Committee; and am highly grati-
fied, that the Lecture prepared at your earnest request, meets with your appro-
bation. Amidst the numerous drafts which are constantly made upon my
time, it was with much diffidence and hesitation that I undertook this task;
but I feel myself abundantly rewarded on learning the fact, that the effort has,
in any good degree, answered your expectations. For the honor you have
conferred upon me, both by the appointment, and your request for the publica-
tion of the Lecture, I can do no less than comply with your wishes. The
manuscript is at your disposal.

Permit me, Gentlemen, to renew the expression of my earnest desire for the
more enlarged usefulness and the brighter prosperity of your Association, and
for your individual honor and happiness.

Most respectfully yours,

NATHAN S. S. BEMAN.

G. ROBERTSON, Esq. and others,
Committee on Lectures.



LECTURE.



WHETHER circumstances make men, or men make circumstances, is a point which has been largely debated, but which, after all that has been beautifully or eloquently uttered, by the tongue and the pen, still remains an undecided and open question. It is one on which much may be said, upon both sides, and respecting which it might not be safe to affirm or deny, in behalf of the one or the other position, without some restrictions or qualifications. It is the wiser course to say, that both propositions are true within certain limits; and that which acts as a proximate and, perhaps, as an efficient cause, producing its legitimate effect, at one time, is itself the natural effect of an appropriate cause, at another. Or, in other words, in the progress of man, as connected with those multifarious things which constitute society, and which go to make up, in their aggregate, the character, spirit, and achievements of any particular age, cause and effect frequently change their relations to each other. The physical and moral circumstances in which men are placed, in forming and developing their whole characters, may make them what they ultimately

are,—may secure those personal attainments, and prompt them to those sublime moral deeds, or to that still sublimer moral endurance, which become incorporated with themselves, and are finally coupled with their names, and associated with their memories, in the oft-repeated tales of oral tradition, and are surrounded with a halo of brightness, more beauteous and enduring, as they stand out, in bold relief, on the pages of recorded history.

And the converse of all this, is often equally true. Men of a peculiar stamp, and of original and elevated powers, with their eye on a higher and more distant aim than that which is reached by an ordinary mind,—actuated by purer motives than those which are felt by the great mass around them, and not less distinguished for their singleness of purpose and their indomitable perseverance in the objects of their pursuit, mark out their own circumstances, create the element of their own being and achievements, impart a distinctive character to the age in which they live, and sometimes entail that character on ages to come. In the former case, circumstances exert a controlling influence over mind; exciting its slumbering energies, and giving direction and efficiency to its various powers; in the latter, mind triumphs over circumstances, wields the conflicting or opposing elements by which it is surrounded, infuses its own spirit into the yet unbreathing structure, and impresses its own living image upon the features of society.

In estimating the greatness of men, those who create their own circumstances, and enstamp their own genius upon the age, rather than those who are made by the existing agencies of the times, should occupy the first rank. Arch-

imedes said, “Δός μου στῦλ, καὶ τὸν κόσμον κινήσω,” — “Give me a place to stand upon, and I will move the world.” The latter class of men I have mentioned, are like this great mathematician, moving the world, having been furnished with their “πὸν στῦλ,” or place to stand upon; while the former are like the same practical philosopher, first making their own mechanical stand-point, and then, by the application of their principles, putting a world in motion! History is rich in examples for the illustration of the actings and influence of both of these classes of mind. Martin Luther was the day-star of a new age. He ushered in the dawn, and gave impulse and direction to the yielding elements of society, political and moral, which has had an influence on the history of civilized man ever since. In several events of his life, his purposes and acts constitute, in the highest degree of intensity, the moral sublime. If you would see man as he may be, and as he has been, and contemplate one of the brightest specimens of humanity, look at this great reformer as he stood before the diet of Worms. That august assemblage was composed of the following dignitaries: The emperor Charles V., whose dominions extended across both hemispheres,—his brother, the arch-duke Ferdinand,—six electors of the empire,—twenty-four dukes,—eight margraves,—thirty arch bishops, bishops and prelates,—seven ambassadors, including those of France and England,—the deputies of ten free cities,—a number of princes, counts, and barons of rank,—the pope’s nuncios: in all two-hundred persons. He was called upon to retract his published opinions, and it was confidently expected he would do it. When the Chancellor of Treves put the cat-

egorical question, "Will you, or will you not retract?" Luther unhesitatingly replied: "Since your most serene majesty and your high mightinesses require of me a simple, clear, and direct answer, I will give one, and it is this:—I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils,—because it is as clear as noon-day, that they have often fallen into error, and even into glaring inconsistencies with themselves. If then I am not convinced by proof from holy Scripture, or by cogent reasons; if I am not satisfied by the very texts that I have cited; and if my judgment is not, in this way, brought into subjection to God's word, I neither can nor will retract anything; for it cannot be right for a christian to speak against his conscience." Then looking calmly around on that imposing assembly that held in its hands the power of life and death, he exclaimed: "I stand here and can say no more:—*God help me—amen.*" This man was the author of the Reformation, and the herald of universal liberty to human minds. We are prepared fully to credit what history has recorded, that "The assembly was motionless with astonishment; and several of the princes present could scarcely conceal their admiration."

In reading the history of the American revolution,—perhaps the only war which can be perfectly justified since the days of Joshua,—no one can fail to admire the bright array of choice spirits who bore a part in its eventful scenes. To name one, or a few, would be a silent reproach to others. I dare not do it. They formed a galaxy that girdled our heavens, alive and glowing with light, and every star in it, a full-orbed and brilliant sun! Whether

these men were raised up and qualified, by providence, to breast the storm and meet the exigencies which awaited them, or whether the peculiar pressure which came upon them from without, and the necessity of taxing every talent and resource within, in order to maintain their self-existence and bear their part in an honorable conflict for principle before the eyes of the world, trained them to the full maturity of manhood which they finally attained, is a question which has been often propounded, as a matter of curious speculation : and the answers which have been given are various. That they were a peculiar race of men, cannot be denied. No one generation ever accomplished more than they did. The declaration of independence was an era in the progress of human opinions. The revolution which followed, and which was simply embodying that declaration in acts, was enough to immortalize any set of men. The framing of our system of government, far in advance, in its simplicity, economy, and protection of popular rights, of all that the wisdom and experience of ages had furnished, was the bright coronation of their labors, which could hardly have been anticipated by the most ardent theorist. That all these three should have been the product of the same minds and the work of the same hands, is almost a miracle in the history of man. These men were our fathers; and surely no sons were ever called to build the sepulchers and write the epitaphs of more worthy ancestors. I have not introduced them here to pronounce their eulogy, but to remind you of what kind of men may be reared upon a free soil, and beneath free skies, and amidst the expansive breathings of free air,—for we are to recollect, that they did not gain

their liberty, by the revolution, but only maintained it. 'They never were in bondage to any man.' I have another purpose in this allusion,—and that is to show, that our institutions are adapted to make such men as our country needs, and such as cannot fail to act both favorably and efficiently upon the best interests of our world.

— In tracing the influence of our institutions on mind, I am not about to adopt or inculcate any extreme theory,—for men will be men the world over, and in all ages; and there is probably no form or structure of society within the pale of civilization which has not its specific advantages and defects, and under which the human mind will not show its powers, either in falling in with the natural currents of influence which favor its cultivation, or in stemming those which flow in an opposite direction, and are adverse to the unfolding of its capabilities, and to its progress in knowledge. If we were to imbibe the fanaticism which has possessed some minds across the waters, we might suppose that a strange degeneracy had been superinduced by the influences of this new world which was fast turning men into mere animals, and that the time was not far distant when they would cease to stand erect and walk upon two feet! Nor is this the only dream which has affected the brain,—if indeed the brain has anything to do with the matter,—respecting our country and its institutions. Others would have us believe, that mind expands here by steam-power, and that its greatness can be measured only by the extent of our country. These last theorists seem to think that genius is about to become an American monopoly, and that it is growing so fast on this

soil, that we shall soon need a telescope in order to ascertain its elevation. But these speculations I leave to others. The first class of opinions, which would treat every thing *American* with contempt and scorn, I consign to Mrs. Trollope, and Charles Dickens, Esq., and that whole race of penny scribblers of both genders; and the latter, which would represent the people of this country as having already attained something a little beyond perfection, I leave with political stump-speakers, all over the country, and especially in the great West. If they fail of making out their points, on both sides, the case may be looked upon as hopeless, and others less gifted may well despair!

That our country, which has a native beauty and grandeur of its own,—and that our social and political institutions, which are somewhat original and specific in their character, should come in contact with mind, and excite it to thought and action, and have their appropriate and permanent influence on man, is a position not to be questioned. It is so with every country, and every government. It is a law of human nature, that it should be so. Starting then with this universal truth, we can hardly fail of arriving at a proper conclusion, if we are only guided by facts in its application.

What, then, is our position in this fair inheritance given to us by God and our fathers, and in relation to which the laws of the former and the memory of the latter, call upon us to measure our responsibilities, and then meet them, like men? Is there nothing here to train mind? Nothing to give nutriment and growth and maturity to human beings? It has been asserted, and not without reason, that natural

scenes have their influence in making and educating mind,—that the skies that overhang us, and the stars that look down benignly upon us,—that the green-clad hills,—the tall, dusky mountains,—the rugged, frowning cliffs,—the broad, deep lakes,—the magnificent rivers,—the mighty ocean, grand in its expanse, and sublime in its dark and immeasurable depths, beating, by its own eternal heavings, upon the strong barriers which nature has thrown around it,—all exert their power upon mind. And so they do. Open the book of nature, and cast your eye on the page of this western hemisphere, and read the hand writing of God upon it. Trace the divine pencilings,—so rich, so mellow, so gorgeous, in light and colors. No land can surpass it. Few can equal it. The Infinite has been at work in these old solitudes,—and now man has come to behold and admire his doings; and as they are gazed upon, and arranged and classified, and brought under analysis, they cannot fail to call out and brighten the image of God on “the human face divine.” Nature, I believe, is more successful in giving purpose to mind, than her human imitations, poetry and pictures. Give me the reality, just as the fair hand of heaven made it,—clad in her own robes, unwoven, yet finished,—beauteous in simplicity, yet rich in material and magic texture, rather than the brightest image which the playful fancy or the creative imagination can mirror forth to the mind. Nature can inspire the strong, the original, the refined, the ethereal, in thought, in comparison of which all the dreams and all the visions that have been, or that are within the possibles of existence,

vanish ! But I must not linger in this vestibule of my subject, though its architecture may be imposing.

The structure of society, in this country, is friendly to popular education,—to the training of mind. It differs from all other lands, in this respect. In Europe, as a general fact, and especially in Catholic countries, they have no *people*. I do not mean, that their kingdoms and states are without inhabitants, but society is often a monster, having a head joined to the lower extremities, and no body between them. The more elevated classes and the rabble, and especially the last named, may be found everywhere ; but, in our sense of the term, there are no people. The first thing that attracts the eye of an American traveler when he lands on the shores of the old continent,—and the same is partly true even of England,—is the multitude of men and women who seem rather to *vegetate*, than to exercise the functions of animal life, and the still higher agencies of intelligence and reason. How a system of popular and universal education can be carried out, in such countries, and the frame work of society remain what it now is, presents a problem difficult to be solved. Take Great Britain,—a country as favorable for such a work as almost any other in Europe, and where the theme is on every tongue,—and two or three facts are sufficient to prove, to a moral certainty that the national mind can never be educated, so that the great masses shall become a reading, thinking, reasoning people, while society is organized on the present model. The day is far distant when their twenty-eight millions will become so far enlightened as to understand their moral and social relations, their personal

and civil rights, the geography and history of their own kingdom, the application of mind to the physical elements around them, so that they shall minister to the comforts of life, the blessings of education to their children, and their still higher and more enduring relations to God and another world, unless the social edifice is essentially re-modeled from the deep foundations to the heaven-aspiring pinnacle! There are in Great Britain four millions of paupers,—one seventh part of the population of the empire. One in every seven, a pauper. Since 1815—thirty years—they have been taxed for the support of these paupers £200,000,000—or \$1,000,000,000. And yet the annual income of a single noble lord is estimated at 400,000 pounds sterling, or two millions of dollars. In such a country universal education is out of the question.—But with us the case is entirely different. The means of mental and moral culture are within the reach of almost every member of the community. Hardly any man need remain in ignorance. As a general fact, property is more equally diffused among the people,—furnishing a beautiful illustration of the Republican principle,—and very few are borne down and oppressed by the calamities either of poverty or wealth.

The tyranny of caste which, in its segregating influence, has always put its stern veto on popular education, is less severe and exclusive, in this country, than in almost any other. Jealousies, growing out of social conditions and established ranks, cannot exist to any considerable extent among us, and what do occasionally spring up, are altogether gratuitous and uncalled for, because no such

distinctions belong to our country. Our nobility, if we have any, is that of nature. God made it, and not man, and it is not as easily tainted by contact with humanity, as the artificial and spurious! It belongs to the "inner man," and is not the creature of human law, statute or common. Men are not here stereotyped, in the condition of their parents, and in which they themselves,—without their own consent,—may have been born. We acknowledge no such arbitrary and unyielding customs of society. The mind within—the immortal of man—is permitted to expand itself, and throw off the crushing disabilities which may weigh it down, and make and occupy its own level, as graduated by intelligence and attainment, by activity and worth. I do not say, that it always is so. But it may be so. There is nothing in the usages of society to prevent it. Here a man may make, or unmake himself, in half a life-time. This must operate as a stimulus to mind,—to the activity of thought, to the acquirement of knowledge, to general and diffusive education. It permits a man to feel that he is a *man*, and not another man's shadow! This is the natural form of human society, symmetrical and beautiful, as ordained of heaven,—where mind is unchained and free, like the air that breathes around the mountain-tops, or the gushing streams that leap from their sublime declivities, and course along their sides, and water the green, fertile vales. Educate mind,—leave it unshackled,—and it will find its own level. Had this been the case, in some other countries,—many a peasant would have become a prince, and many a nobleman, a postillion or a lackey. As long as the barriers of caste continue to separate the different

orders of society from each other, as by walls of brass or adamant,—walls which are too solid to be broken through and too high to be leaped over,—what I mean by the education of a people, is out of the question. And it matters not whether that caste assumes its perfect form, as among the semi-barbarians of India, or aspires only at an humble imitation, as among the more enlightened and polished of England, France and Italy.

But these are not our only peculiarities. While the education and discipline of mind—the acquirement and the uses of knowledge, are among the great objects of our being, no people are more abundantly furnished with the necessary means, than ourselves. The comparative ease with which the necessities and conveniencies of life may be obtained,—and indeed many of its little delicacies too,—leaves almost every one in possession of time for reading and study. Not only the professional man, but the merchant, the clerk, the mechanic, the apprentice, the farmer, the day laborer, may all find abundant leisure for training their higher powers,—for acquiring not only that knowledge adapted to their own peculiar calling, but to become well informed on many general subjects. But those who would accomplish this, must not be satisfied with bodily activity, and mental indolence. They must consider time more than *money*,—they must look upon it as intellectual and moral wealth. Their intervals of business and labor must be devoted, not to self-indulgence and dissipation, but to reading, reflection, and mental discipline. Books too are within the reach of every one. If we have any reason to complain, it is, that they are too cheap, especially

if they were not better than many which come, at the present day, like the frogs of Egypt, croaking from the press, and find their way "into the bed-chambers," if not into the very "kneading troughs," of both city and country. One of the first objects of every young man should be to procure, little by little, a well selected library. In twenty years, it will become a rich treasure,—more valuable than bank-stock, or a splendid wardrobe, or extravagant expenditures upon self-created and factitious appetites. With a good library and intercourse with cultivated minds, any young man may educate himself.

There is another process, always going on, in our Republic, which should be noticed in this connection. The discussions which never fail to interest a free people, and stir up the hidden and spiritual man within, cannot but have their effect upon mind; nor is this influence confined to any one portion of the community. It is a power, pervading and diffusive, having intense relations to every part and to every member of the entire body politic. As the government and people are one, every great interest which comes before the assembled representatives, comes before the nation. There is an amazing educational power, in all this, which has not been duly estimated by writers on government and systems of mental training. The free discussion of every subject which is presented to the American Congress, every year, and consequently to the millions of our people, is itself an important process of education. Men read attentively, feel deeply, and speak frankly, on these subjects of thrilling interest. While their own minds become awakened and excited, the effect is certain. The

various powers are stirred up, and the training process goes on. The information thus gained, for its own sake, and its incidental and certain effect on the human mind, can hardly be overrated. A free people form a national academy, in which the process of self-education is carried on, by the spontaneous action of its own essential elements. Every thing which relates to agriculture, manufactures and commerce, to our domestic and foreign relations, to peace and war, to internal improvements, to taxation and expenditures, to freedom and oppression, to the safety, protection and happiness of the Republic, comes before the nation, and must interest every individual. These things are "not done in a corner." They all stand out before the eyes, and are proclaimed in the ears, of the people. Here, then, we have a kind of national education of itself. If this were all that could be said, on this point, you would be likely to have, in this country, a people of more than ordinary intelligence. But this is not all. We have, in these things, only the alphabet of the lessons taught,—the title-page of the deep and instructive volume. Open that volume, and read still farther.

The state of mind produced by these discussions is less important, in its direct than its incidental relations. The mental excitement, thus produced, is necessary to the education of a people. No nation was ever well instructed in the art of thinking and reasoning, in the application of knowledge to the abridgment of labor and to the increase of the comforts of life, in their relations to man and God, to earth and heaven, without freedom of inquiry and discussion. This lies at the basis of all training, human and

divine. Man is a thing, and not a moral agent, without it. You can educate a free people, and no other. The awakened mind loves thought,—lives on investigation,—expands by its own exercises,—becomes impatient to see, and know, and comprehend,—and luxuriates in the discovery of facts and the revelations of truth ! If our system of government, its free discussions, and the deep national participation in the great topics which are addressed to all, and which embody the interests and existence of all, shall fail eventually to secure the education of this people, it will be our own fault. The philosophy of the position I have assumed, I have no doubt, is sound, and will be ordinarily sustained by experience. A failure, if it occur, must be charged to an abuse of the principle.

And what, I ask, are systems of education under the more arbitrary forms of government ? They are very different from what they are, or should be among us.—They are restricted to classes, as such,—so that it is little more than a drilling for the destiny marked out for each class, by the usages of society. It teaches the son to walk in the footsteps of the father, as mechanically as one quadruped, be his ears long or short, follows another, in the beaten track, around the bark-mill. And the things taught, are often such as can hardly constitute a system of education. They do not train mind. They have little or nothing to do with the power of thought. They often consist of the mere dogmas of the exerting government and the established forms of religion. It may be fairly questioned, whether the peculiar zeal which has been recently kindled up, in some parts of Europe, for the education of the people, has

not for its leading object, political discipline, for the support of the throne and the mitre, rather than the expansion of mind, the diffusion of light and intelligence, the growth of liberal sentiments, and the happiness of the people.

The elective franchise cannot but have its influence upon mind, and its cultivation. As the safeguard of civil rights, this subject has been so often and so ably discussed, and is so well understood in this country, that it may be left to stand upon its own basis. It should be dear to a nation, as "the apple of the eye." In all the essential interests of a social existence, it is the right arm of personal protection. Without it, man *may* be free by the mere sufferance of others, but he has no bond to secure him. The first revolution of the wheel may crush his hopes and his inheritance, with himself, to the dust! That it belongs to the people, there can be no doubt; and yet no nation should bestow it too heartily upon mere adventurers who have no knowledge of the government, no interest in the soil, and nothing to gain or lose by any possible contingencies. It is too rich a pearl to be thrown away with romantic wantonness, or bartered for the warblings of a mere political song.

But I do not refer to it here as a mere matter of politics. It has much higher and more sacred relations. It is a stimulus to intellect, a promoter of thought, the handmaid of education; and where the great body of the people are freemen, and have a right to march up, with the face and front of men, to the ballot-box, you have stirring motives to intellectual culture—to the analysis of mind—to its progress and perfection in knowledge, which never exist

where human beings are enrolled as political cyphers. Where the law and public sentiment make something of a man, he will, as a general fact, make something of himself; and there is no surer way to annihilate mind, and efface the last vestage of humanity from his immortal essence, than to put the stigma of inferiority upon him, and then let pride and scorn stand, and point the finger at him! In these circumstances, he feels like a cashiered soldier, an outlawed citizen, a whipped slave! He is an exile from home, in the midst of the surrounding multitude; and he cannot stand up among those who should be his compeers, with the conscious feeling of manliness, and meet the claims of others upon him, and discharge, with a becoming spirit, the various duties of social life. Destroy self-respect and personal confidence, and his mental executions will be feeble and vapid, and even his corporeal will be the promptings of necessity, rather than the spontaneous movings of a free spirit. Body and mind are both chained. This has been the course of our world and its governments, from olden time. The *people* have been made the POPULACE beneath its Stygian shades and leaden sceptre. Despotism, in every age, has built and maintained his throne, and so has his royal consort ignorance too, by excluding the people from all participation in the affairs of government. They have been looked upon as too low and too vulgar to intermeddle with such deep and sacred mysteries. And *when* and *where* have nations, thus governed, ever been educated? NEVER, and NOWHERE! The school-house and the ballot-box belong to the same category,—and universal intelligence will never prevail where men are not freemen.

But if the elective franchise has its power over mind, by inspiring self-respect and manliness of purpose, as I have already, though feebly traced, much more of the same character may be asserted respecting the mode in which our government is administered. I refer to its popular administration, or the appointment of its effective agencies. Popular elections, no doubt, have their incidental evils, but they are necessary evils, for the purpose of securing the greater good. Men are not born rulers here. And why should they be? It is one of the anomalies of human society, that it is so anywhere! We have no kings. We want none. Our fathers left their old homes, and fled across the ocean, and took shelter in the wilderness, in order to escape from their merciless grasp: and we shall not soon forget the story. We have no queens here, except those who are elected by individual suffrage, and that only to reign over a very *select* and *limited* territory. The only crown they wear, is their own native excellence, and as they are not usurpers, no one should wish to depose them. We have no hereditary nobles, deriving their claims to priority of rank from some successful military chieftan, and enriched by the spoils of the nation. We never can have such an order of men here, without a revolution which shall first lay the constitution in the sepulchre, and chant its funeral dirge, and hang the country around with mourning! Rulers here are only a portion of the people, selected for the time being, and for a very limited period too, to carry out the will of the community. When this agency is finished, they are mere citizens again, and have no other distinctions than those which are created by real or reputed

worth. A ruler here, whatever office he may fill, is no demi-god. I did not say *demagogue*, for he may be that ! The senator, the judge, the governor of a State, the president of the Republic, are all citizens, filling to be sure, by the designation of the people, dignified and responsible offices, but they receive no servile homage, they affect no ‘ pomp and circumstance,’ but are merely the head and hand and mouthpiece of the nation. They are “the servants of the people.” This description of rulers has been much ridiculed in older and more stately governments, but it asserts the true principle. It is beautifully announced and illustrated by one of the greatest and best of men, and in a connection quite analogous to the one now before us. The gifted and immortal Paul, speaking of himself and his fellow-apostles, says,—“*Ourselves your SERVANTS,*”—and yet they were both rulers and teachers.

That this state of things should affect mind, and promote inquiry, and give impulse to education,—I mean popular and national education, any one can see by a single glance of thought. The highest offices of state, are open to all. Every man in the nation may be a competitor. No one is excluded, except he may have been guilty of the involuntary crime of wearing a black skin, or the *voluntary*, and probably the still deeper crime—*because voluntary*—of wearing a black coat ! All others are eligible to any office,—to every office. These things have their effect. The nation feels it. It makes a vivid—thinking—reading—active people. All are pushing forward to something higher and better. The nation is agitated. Mind is electrified. The face brightens, in all its features. The eye

speaks. The tongue is eloquent. You see nothing of that profound dullness which characterizes the lower classes in some of the kingdoms of Europe,—those dead, plaster-of-Paris faces where a struggling thought from within has never yet reached the surface. A man, among us, may choose his own position, if he will submit to the necessary toil. He may pave his own way, and then walk in it. The plough-boy, of to-day, may, in thirty years, be the President of the United States. Some of our best legislators and magistrates have once been our enterprising merchants, or our laborious farmers, or active mechanics. Nobility may curl the lip, and princes may shake the proud head and turn away the scornful eye, and pronounce all this unbecoming and vulgar,—but it will not hurt us. We claim to be a nation of noblemen and princes,—veritable and legitimate monarchs—born to govern ourselves. This state of things makes an appropriate and successful appeal to the hidden spirit of man ; and it is producing a national activity of thought, a desire for information, self-denials and sacrifices in its pursuit, and actual attainments too, rarely to be found among any people, on Island or Continent, in circumnavigating the globe. It is true, we are a youthful people, and, in the estimation of some of the hoary headed nations, perhaps a little *green* ; but time will cure this, and there can be no doubt but a ripe and dignified manhood is before us. And that manhood, we trust, if it be not perpetual as the earth itself, will be followed only by a far distant and vigorous old age. But this prediction, if prediction you call it, can be verified only by the fact, that this generation, and each successive genera-

tion, shall make the most of themselves and their circumstances.

The principles I have laid down, in this rapid and imperfect sketch, I am well aware, are liable to abuse; and this is the place to record certain qualifications which should ever be borne in mind. We are to remember, that no causes, political or moral, act upon mind, as physical agents act upon matter. They may be used for their benign and appropriate purpose, or they may be perverted to very different, and even opposite purposes. Mind is free. Amidst those educational influences to which I have referred, we are not to remain mere passive recipients of impressions, or idle spectators of the motive scene. The elements are awakened and agitated, and the living generation must control them. This country, in all its future history, will be what we ourselves and others, under the government of God, shall make it. Matter is subject to mind. And so are the institutions of a country of every name, political, literary, and religious. Their action is not mechanical. It is not in the power of green fields and romantic waterfalls,—of free discussion and the ballot-box,—of the shadow of a church steeple and the exterior of a school-house, to make a people intellectual and wise, without their own concurrence and mental efforts. Furnished then, as we are, with a place to stand upon, how are we to give a happy and beneficent impulse to our country and the world? It is comparatively easy to move them; but what is the almost divine secret of moving them aright? Of giving them a direction for weal, and not for wo? No class in the community are more deeply interested in these ques-

tions, than young men. They must soon stand up in the place and bear the responsibilities of their fathers.

There is a special demand here for an industrious and active people. Labor must be held in reputation. Whenever it shall be deemed dishonorable, in man or woman, to employ the functions of body or mind, for useful purposes, the days of our glory are numbered and finished. You may watch the last lingering rays of the setting sun, as they bid farewell to the mountain-tops. We have every thing yet to do. We have forests to chop down and subdue, mines to explore, mountains to level, broad fields to cultivate, landscapes to finish and beautify, and half a hemisphere to fit up, by the mingled and magic contributions of taste and genius, science and art, for the accommodation and training of three hundred millions of human beings. The man who can be idle here, should have a niche assigned him with the seven fabled sleepers of other times.

We should be,—and if we would carry out the purpose of the founders of this empire,—we *must* be an intellectual people. As our position and circumstances favor education, so we should never rest till the national mind is fully enlightened and developed. “UNIVERSAL EDUCATION,” should be the motto inscribed on the walls of every family mansion, on our system of legislation, over the door of every log cabin, upon every church edifice, and upon the very soil on which we stand. It should glow in every line of poetry, brighten in every finished picture, and give charms to the melody of every national song. The sentiment should pervade every political party, and characterize every political movement. It should beat strong, as

the pulse of life, in every mother's heart, open every father's hand, in liberal expenditures for this object, and kindle up a glow of enthusiasm in the active and elastic spirit of every young American. The country is ruined without it. Neglect this, and self-government is a failure. It is a mere floating bubble that will soon burst, and despots will laugh at it. This country can never be made what it may be, and should be, without large and perpetual drafts upon cultivated mind.

We should be a pacific people. The war spirit is a savage spirit. You may turn it over and over, and look it through and through, and this is all you can make of it. It is hardly less adverse to the genius of republicanism, than to the genius of christianity. It is a spirit that drinks human blood, and eats dead men's flesh from their bones! Ten men in a nation are generally responsible for every war that occurs. If they were caught and caged, the world would enjoy the blessings of universal peace. Ninety-nine in every hundred of all the controversies which agitate nations, and drive them to the fierce arbitration of the sword, could be amicably adjusted, if only one side were governed by strict moral and religious principle, and every one, if both sides were under that happy influence. The true interests of this country lie in a pacific policy. Every thing depends on it. Agriculture, manufactures, commerce, in all their ramifications among us, need a long and settled peace in order to make them what they should be, and to bring out this country into the full blaze of its prospective glory. One war now would throw us back half a century, in these interests alone. And as to other and more deep

and thrilling interests, twice that period could never repair its ravages. The state of national morals which invariably follows on the footsteps of war, is, if possible, more appalling than all the murdered men that cover the battle-field, and all the mourning that hangs around the once happy, but now desolated dwellings, and all the tears that bathe the mother's pallid cheek, and all the unuttered anguish which settles down upon the new-made widow's heart! If this nation knows its own interests, and has wisdom and manliness enough to stand by them, we shall not be easily dragged into an unnecessary and bloody war.

It is almost superfluous for me to say, that no nation, on earth, is as directly and as deeply affected by the moral and religious principles of the individuals who compose it, as our own. If ignorance would ruin us, much more would irreligion and vice. The primary idea which I attach to a republican is, that he is a man who is willing to govern himself by principle, without the intervention of the strong arm of external power. To our country, a brighter indication of prosperity and glory, and perpetuity too, could not cheer us, than a race of young men under the controlling influence of strict moral and religious principle. You know where to find such a man. He is true to his country,—true to his word,—true to his God. No prosperity, however exhilarating,—no adversity, however deep and depressing,—no distance of place, however remote,—no lapse of time, however protracted,—no changes on the earth, or in the skies, can unsettle his fixed principles, or extinguish, in his bosom, the living flame which has been kindled up and is fanned there, by the love of truth and

heaven! Give us such a race of young men, and this land shall bloom, like Eden. Matter shall bow to mind.—The elements of nature shall be harnessed, and broke to the use of man. The old dark forests shall be supplanted by harvest-fields and beauteous landscape gardens; teeming cities and villages, and romantic hamlets, shall spring up, like enchantment, along the margin of our lakes and rivers, and cover the land; and a glowing picture of thrift and gladness shall here be spread out, before the fair face of heaven, sketched and finished and colored, by the united executions of intellect and freedom.

But in order to accomplish all this, we must have a character of our own,—and that character should be distinguished for intelligence, industry, manliness, piety and straight forward republican simplicity. We want no half-made men,—mere *babies* in men's garments! We need those who can stand alone, and meet the demands which their country and the age make upon them, and find their amusements principally in the discharge of their duties. Aping the manners of the old tottering Babels of the East, is not less foreign to the spirit, than to the letter of our institutions. Wasting and decay have often crept into governments and withered the prosperity of nations, by very subtle and unsuspected channels. The dancing of Sempronia, not less than the fire-brands of Catiline, shook the foundations of Roman virtue, and prepared her sons for chains; and the masquerades of France drew on, in their train, that great national tragedy, which has been forcibly called “The beginning of the end,” in which every man was masked, and the guillotine was the only personation

in which real and apparent were the same. We want here a manly simplicity : no gorgeous trappings of moarchy,—no starred and gartered aristocracy,—no childish paraphernalia fit only to amuse little girls and school boys ! It may be doubted whether the costume and badges, the titles and ceremonies sometimes adopted by secret societies, in this country, do not, on the whole, foster that spirit which belongs exclusively to monarchs and nobles and political ecclesiastics. These, to be sure, as they here exist, are mere straws,—but ‘straws may show which way the wind blows.’ They stimulate a popular gaping after those distinctions which are foreign to the genius of our country, and which exclude mind, and comprehend only “the outward man.” I never wish to see the citizens of this republic, as Pope would say,

“ Stuck o’er with titles, and hung round with strings.”

It only remains for me to congratulate the Young Gentlemen of this Association, on the completion and opening of this beautiful and spacious room for public lectures. And in connection with this pleasing event, I am reminded of that Trojan spirit which laid the foundations and reared the superstructure of this noble edifice. With solid capital at its basis, and taste and letters in the more delicate finish of these elevated apartments, this Athenæum will long stand as a monument of the enterprise and prosperity of our city ; and it cannot fail to give a fresh and happy impulse both to mind and business. This evening is a new era in your associated existence,—and your future zeal and success, I trust, will be the true and lucid commentary on these enlarged and splendid accommoda-

tions. The retrospect is certainly honorable. Your Association has existed a little more than ten years, and, during that period, you have had not less than 270 public Lectures, from as many as ninety different speakers, residing in various parts of our country. You have thus furnished, for yourselves and your fellow citizens, many rich intellectual entertainments which have had their influence on the knowledge, taste, literature, and morals of the city. Nor is the prospect for the future less cheering. You now have, in this edifice, every accommodation you need. But if you would make your Association, in the highest degree, and emphatically, the richest blessing it is capable of being to yourselves and this community, you must have a *library*. I do not mean a few books,—but a LIBRARY. You need books, not for reading only, but for reference, on every subject pertaining to human knowledge and inquiry. There is no such library in our State, and hardly in our country. If you early settle the purpose, that this city shall possess such a treasure, it can be easily accomplished; and the time will come when Troy shall be as classical in character as in name; and men of science and letters shall make this smiling valley of the Hudson and these picturesque hills around us, the place of their resort and residence, in order to derive streams from such a fountain, which shall again go out, in other and diversified channels, to irrigate, and cheer, and bless the world.

Permit me, then, in the name of the projectors and builders of this Athenæum, to welcome you to this magnificent Hall;—and, as I do it, let me say, honor your position, and stand by the peculiar principles of our institutions,—the

principles of self-government,—and, without any reference to party, be it said, the principles of true democracy. Be men, be christians, be republicans. And, on no occasion, surrender or compromise your creed. For the earth, if you could have it all, or for the brightest orb that hangs in the deep blue vault of heaven, if you could become the lords of its broad and shining domains, never give up your love of these principles, and their influence on mind. The light should not be esteemed more sweet, nor life itself more precious. In all the vicissitudes of time,—and doubtless many are before you,—let your purpose and principles change not. In sunshine and storm,—when summer's heats and winter's frosts prevail,—in the noise and din of the crowded city, and amidst the balmy and elastic breathings of the country air,—surrounded by the babbling throng or the speechless solitude,—in the deep shades of midnight and the broad beams of noon-day,—whether weal or wo betide you, turn instinctively to these principles, and there repose, with a strength of purpose and fulness of delight, which nothing but the love of truth and God can inspire. Young Gentlemen, my heart is with you and
YOURS.

April 26, 1855





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